

BLACKFRIARS

REVIEWS

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY.

MODERN HANDBOOKS ON RELIGION. By A. C. Bouquet. (Cambridge : W. Heffer & Sons.)

The Stanton Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion in the University of Cambridge describes the main features in the view of religion as it appears to a modern Anglo-Saxon mind with Catholic sympathies. 'Feeling is important for religious belief, less, however, in supplying it with content than in lending it strength,' and accordingly the first book in the series is *A Study of the Ordinary Arguments for the Existence and Nature of God* (pp. 62 ; 2/6). What there is about the nature of God is anticipated in the proofs for His existence, and rather spoils their effect. For simultaneously too little seems to be expected of them, and too much. Too little, inasmuch as they are regarded as deriving from the data of comparative religion and supposing some sort of religious experience; too much, as hurrying immediately to the Christian idea of God. In both of which respects St. Thomas is instructive; for he starts his arguments from an atheist background; and then, having proved First Mover, Cause, Necessity, Value, Purpose, afterwards proceeds without precipitance to relate these conclusions and construct a scientific knowledge of the nature of God. This handbook moves mostly in a region just below metaphysical theology; consequently the high philosophical vigour of the traditional arguments is not sustained, and their true force not sufficiently discerned beneath the incidental history, experience and physics that surround them. Nevertheless, it is to be heartily recommended as a useful complement to the more stringent scholastic approach to the subject.

Even more descriptive, the second of the series, *Religious Experience, its Nature, Types and Validity* (pp. 133 ; 3/6), provides an introduction to the psychological study of religion. It would have gained by the adoption of a clear distinction between the supernatural and the preternatural, between the life of grace which mounts to the heights of contemplative prayer in the saints and those occasional phenomena which at their best are only miraculous and at their worst merely pathological. Another point; while it is true that Catholic theory of the Fall regards it as essentially a deprivation of the supernatural, in opposition to Lutheran theory which treats it as a lapse from nature into corruption, the natural and supernatural are so

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closely connected in man that the loss of grace has weakened and wounded his very nature. There is much thoughtful writing in this book, and some good criticism. It attempts to establish the legitimacy of intuitive experience as evidence for the activity of God, and that this is capable of being submitted to various tests. The rational tests given by the author are those a Catholic would use; indeed, the teaching is repeated of such a representative writer as Poulain.

The third of the series is an essay in historical perspective. *Phases of the Christian Church* (pp. 150; 4/-) is perhaps the most interesting as, of its nature, it is the most contentious. Dr. Bouquet, while holding that the 'Christian movement' is not merely an aggregation of human units, nor a voluntary association of pious individuals engaged in religious research, but an organism formed by God through the historical Christ, is convinced that we need to take a more balanced and forward-reaching view of its history. He briefly surveys the phases through which it has passed. A Jewish sect; a partially Gentile community; an illegal secret society; a privileged community existing within the State; the dominant religious society; an order of persons within the State; nationalist disruption, and a series of spiritual societies ruling by persuasion; the modern attempts at federation. A Dominican is not unnaturally surprised to be told that Aquinas places philosophy and theology on a level, and that the friars as a living movement withered when they came under the official patronage of the Papacy. There are many other points of difference; for instance, the author's feeling that the Christian opposition to contraception is just a stiff piece of conservatism, and that there is significance in the fact that such an attitude cannot be demonstrated from the Gospels. But the book is well worth reading, and provides much matter for thought. The following passage, although interesting, is not altogether a fair sample of its quality.

'Standing central, with the largest number of adherents, is the great Roman communion. Its structure is closely knit. As an institution it depends for its durability upon an unbending exercise of authority and discipline, upon its long and carefully stored experience, and consequently upon its unflinching success in producing a well-defined type of spiritual character. Like Hinduism it seeks to be all things to all men, and consequently embraces within its limits a large variety of different and sometimes, as it must seem, contradictory types, so long as they are prepared to submit to authority. Up to the present, however, it has depended for the intellectual justification of its position upon interpretations of the text of Scrip-

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ture and of the events of history which are singularly vulnerable to criticism. Those, therefore, who have a keen sense of the importance of truth and accuracy are as much repelled by its attempt to rationalise its position as they are bound to esteem the holiness and self-discipline of many of its members. It is probably hampered in this respect by its traditional rôle as the Church of the Mediterranean races, whose mass-conversion in bygone days deeply infected the Church with the predilections of people possessing matrilineal and polytheistic tendencies, while at the same time in organisation it became, as we have already seen, the residuary legatee of the temporal power of the Western Roman Empire. It is a strange complex, amongst its strongest features being the sharp distinction between clergy and laity, the continued emphasis upon the two levels of human life, and the stress laid upon the importance of expiatory as distinct from creative sacrifice.'

The fourth book of the series, *The World we Live In* (pp. 111; 2/6), makes its appeal to a wider public. It gives a brief description of the universe in a corner of which we find ourselves, as it is pictured by modern science. And as, says Dr. Bouquet, all Christians must accept it. In reality, of course, they do so at their own risk, and merely as ordinary intelligent people with scientific tastes, prepared to change their views. The advanced thought of one age becomes old-fashioned in the next, and we have suffered enough from Fundamentalism in the past to wish to avoid loading Christian posterity with the doctrine of human freedom committed to scientific indeterminism for example. There is no essential affiliation between Christian truth and any purely physical theory. The author speaks of the picture of the universe taken over by St. Thomas. *Picture* is the word; it was that and no more; for it is the *idea* that matters, and that remains whether the picture be that of Ptolemy or Copernicus or Jeans. A Catholic can be any sort of scientist he likes, so long as his science remains scientific and is not extended into a universal theory. This is not to exclude science, but merely to make a necessary distinction. This book is of more ephemeral value than the others in the series, yet it is informative as to the way in which a Christian thinker can regard the picture of the universe in yesterday's scientific issue.

Three more books, on the origin and growth of religion, on Our Lord, and on the nature and attributes of God, will complete a series which well deserves the attention of Catholic students of philosophy and theology.

T.G.